ECE Highlights

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE No. 35 May 1999

Éditorial

Volonté d'Europe

L'Europe est un espace uni et divers. Elle n'a d'autre fondement que les valeurs que partagent ses peuples et le sens d'un destin commun. C'est un devoir exigeant pour tous que de construire et préserver l'unité de l'Europe, tout en respectant sa diversité. C'est un devoir plus pressant encore aujourd'hui que les événements du Kosovo font ressortir de vieilles divisions religieuses et ethniques.

Dans le même temps les disparités économiques s'aggravent. Entre les pays les plus pauvres et les plus riches, l'écart du PIB par tête était de 1 à 5 en 1990, il est aujourd'hui de 1 à 9 . Ces disparités ont pour cause les difficultés de la transition, un processus lent, complexe et souvent douloureux de construction de la démocratie et de l'économie de marché, processus que certains pays ont à peine entamé ou qui se trouve entravé dans certaines régions par des conflits ethniques et parfois des guerres. Ces disparités augmentent les risques de division.

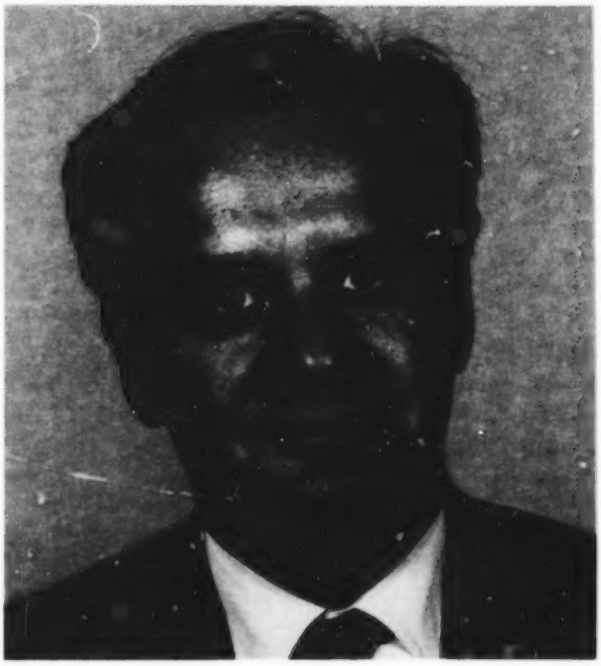
Dans ces circonstances, les peuples d'Europe ont besoin d'un objectif commun. Ils ont besoin de savoir que leurs dirigeants sont décidés à créer une Europe où chaque pays est respecté et a sa place, quels que soient les différences religieuses, le degré de développement économique, l'appartenance à un ensemble sous-régional ou à un autre. Plus que jamais, la Commission économique pour l'Europe et les autres organisations paneuropéennes que sont l'OSCE et le Conseil de l'Europe doivent être mises au service de cette ambition : leur neutralité et leur expérience leur permettent de tisser ces mille liens qui font la force des familles.

Le Secrétaire exécutif,
Commission économique pour l'Europe

Yves BERTHELOT

(For the English translation, see p. 12.)

Pensions through solidarity



Interview with

Mr. Jean-Michel Charpin,

Commissioner at the French Planning Office. Author of a report on the future of the French pension system

ECE Highlights: ***Is the pension system based on redistribution, such as the French one, still viable?***

Mr. Jean-Michel Charpin: The French system of redistribution has achieved its goals. It is now a universal system, even if not a unified one. It is a system based on many forms of solidarity: solidarity between generations, solidarity between various pension regimes, solidarity within these regimes, with corrective measures for career risks and family situations, and solidarity at the national level with a minimum old-age pension. This system is now mature and has on the whole succeeded in ensuring that the

income of pensioners is proportionate to that of the working population, which is quite an achievement. For the future, this system can perfectly continue to function as a universal system. However, it will be faced with demographic changes: longer life expectancy on the one hand and ageing post-war generations on the other. This system will, consequently, have to be adapted to maintain its long-term balance.

One of the measures mentioned in your report is extending the period of contribution from 37.5 to 42.5 years. What would be the economic effects of raising the retirement age? In particular, how would it affect unemployment?

The Prime Minister has asked the *Commissariat général du Plan* to assess the situation and the prospects of our pension system. In this context, we had to consider a certain number of modifications to ensure the long-term balance of our pension regimes and, in particular, consider extending the period of contribution to obtain a full pension. Such an extension would result—starting in 2005-2010—in a gradual raising of the retirement age between 60 and 65. This is natural insofar as we know that life expectancy will continue to increase at a rapid pace, the age of entry into the labour force has not ceased to increase and, finally, the health of the over-60s has improved considerably. With regard to the link with unemployment, it is necessary to study carefully the compatibility of this change in the retirement age with the situation on the labour market. It is clear that for the coming years, and at least until 2005, the absolute priority must remain the fight against unemployment and making it easier for young people to join the labour force. After 2005, the situation on the labour market should improve, the integration of young people should become easier and the number of early retirements should fall. This is why we are considering increasing the period of contribution, which would have a statistically significant impact only from 2010.

How do you reconcile job insecurity, unemployment and the fact that people will have to contribute for longer?

Macroeconomic simulations have considered three scenarios. In the first, the rate of unemployment decreases to 9 per cent and then remains constant. In the second, the rate of unemployment drops to 6 per cent and nearly all the potential early retirees stay in work. In the third scenario, the rate of unemployment falls to 3 per cent, potential early retirees stay in work and, in addition, young people join the workforce 9 months earlier. We thus studied a broad range of macroeconomic scenarios, all of which foresee a fall in unemployment compared to today. These scenarios cover a relatively broad field. Regarding the jobless, there are already mechanisms to cover spells of unemployment for pension purposes. If there are gaps in these mechanisms, they will have to be filled.

Germany spends 12.8 per cent of its GDP on funding pensions, Italy 13.4 per cent and France 12.1 per cent. Would it be feasible to increase these social contributions in France?

The option of increasing social security contributions to finance the welfare state is always available. It is up to the country as a whole to decide what the best solution is. Increasing social security contributions remains one of the options open to public debate. The reason why our proposals focus mainly on raising the retirement age and building up a reserve fund is that both require decisions to be taken long in advance. Financing through higher contributions does not require this. It will always be possible to cover deficits, if deficits there are, by raising the contributions.

In Germany, it takes 45 years of contribution to obtain a full pension, in Italy 40 and in Great Britain 44. Are we moving towards harmonization?

There is no need to harmonize this kind of rule between European countries. Enough things are already regulated at the European Union level; there is no need to add others unnecessarily. Some coordination mechanisms are useful, but there is no need to unify the pension plans.

Will the pensions that your scenarios generate be sufficient to live on or will a complementary plan be needed?

We have studied the possibility of a reserve fund, but we have not studied the option of pension funds, which would create new benefits. The central problem is that in an average scenario pension expenditure represents 16 per cent of GDP, whereas the foreseeable income will be 12 per cent of GDP, so a number of parameters will have to be adjusted. We have not worked out what would happen if new benefits were added.

The Charpin report is being hotly debated. Why? And what is the next stage?

Reforming a pension system can never be straightforward. In all the countries where it has been carried out, it has required studies, consultation and public debate. In France we are in the middle of this process. I have just held consultations with the unions and the employers, pension plan managers and the representatives of the pensioners. This has made it possible to reach a joint assessment of the situation and of the future of the pensions. The next stage must be a public debate on this assessment and all the partners concerned should put forward their proposals. ❑

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF POPULATION AGEING IN THE UN/ECE REGION

The UN/ECE Spring Seminar

3 May 1999

On 3 May 1999, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) will hold its Spring Seminar which will focus on the economic implications of population ageing in the UN/ECE region. Four themes will be discussed:

- **The economic consequences of population ageing and the macroeconomics of pension reform;**
- **Pension reform in market economies;**
- **Reforming pension systems in the transition economies: problems and policies within a broader programme of transformation;**
- **What are the implications for pension reforms of the global financial and economic crisis?**

NEWS UPDATE

First Inter-Agency Coordination Meeting for the European Region held at the Palais des Nations

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General says one of the central themes of United Nations reform is to achieve greater coherence across the Organization

The first Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Meeting for the area covered by the Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), as mandated by Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, was held in Geneva on 9 February 1999. The meeting was chaired by Louise Fréchette, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. The overall purpose of the meeting was to conduct a review of existing cooperation mechanisms and arrangements at the regional level with a view to assessing the effectiveness and adequacy of these mechanisms and to propose ways of improving the collective response by the United Nations system to the needs of the region. It was the first in a series of coordination meetings at the regional level. Other meetings are scheduled to be held in the other regions of the world later in the year. The ECE regional meeting brought together representatives from the European offices of some 20 United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

In her opening statement, the Deputy Secretary-General noted that the regional consultation meetings responded to a decision by the Economic and Social Council in the context of its review of the United Nations reform launched by the Secretary-General two years ago. One of the central themes of the reform was to achieve greater coherence across the Organization. A number of mechanisms had been put in place that made a difference in how the various United Nations organizations work together and discuss specific issues both at the global and country levels. At the regional level, some progress had already been made and the annual regional consultation meetings were intended to support this process.

Following a rich and lively exchange of views, it was agreed that there was a need for the United Nations organizations to further develop the dialogue at the regional level in order to collectively improve their common understanding of each region's needs, trends and challenges, leading periodically to a joint assessment of the economic and social situation therein. It was also agreed that this could lead to shared goals and to sharpened policy dialogues in the region. It was clear that the Resident Coordinator system needed to be supported by all to strengthen United Nations support at the country level.

The opportunity to share views and further define priority areas for joint work was welcomed by participants and it was agreed that a common assessment of the regional situation, to be facilitated by ECE, would be carried out within the next three months. This experience and its subsequent development will be assessed next year at a meeting to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. ❑

SECI's first two years: positive progress

SECI, the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, is the framework in which countries from and around the former Yugoslavia are working together. Despite past and present troubles, this intergovernmental initiative has been making steady progress by setting reasonable short-term objectives and focusing on results. Meeting at UN/ECE, the Initiative's 11 participating States and supporting institutions declared SECI's first two years a success and agreed to continue the Initiative.

SECI was launched in December 1996 based on an agreement between the United States and the European Union, brokered by American Ambassador Richard Schifter. Erhard Busek, former Vice-Chancellor of Austria, was named SECI Coordinator. UN/ECE headed by Executive Secretary Yves Berthelot provides technical assistance to SECI. The "troika" formed by these three individuals has served as the catalyst to SECI's activities. The European Commission, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are among the international institutions supporting SECI's project activities. Operating on a modest budget, Dr. Busek characterized SECI as "help for self-help". While the project activities may lead to proposals for financing from international financial institutions, SECI's real objective is to develop conditions that will make south- east Europe more attractive to private investors. The SECI National Coordinator for Hungary, Ambassador Istvan Balogh, summarized the underlying spirit of SECI when he said, "All the countries of the region should be aware of their own share of responsibility in creating the necessary basic conditions for economic cooperation, the way to a better, more prosperous future".

Each of the eight projects undertaken by SECI is hosted by one of the participating States. The SECI participating States are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey. SECI supporting States include Austria, Italy, the Russian Federation, Switzerland and the United States of America. ❑

DEVELOPMENTS IN TRANSPORT

Executive Board established to coordinate TIR operation

A newly established TIR Executive Board (TIRExB) met in Geneva for its first constitutive session on 25 and 26 March 1999. This new international organ was established by the 62 Contracting States to the TIR Convention to coordinate better the international activities of Governments and national customs authorities to safeguard the functioning of the TIR Customs transit regime.

As a neutral international governmental body, the TIR Executive Board, will, in particular, supervise the practical application of the TIR regime and its international guarantee system, supervise the printing and distribution of TIR Carnets, facilitate the settlement of disputes between States, transport associations and insurance companies and support the training of customs personnel and that of

transport associations working in the framework of the TIR Convention. The Executive Board will also provide a forum for the exchange of intelligence and other information among customs authorities in order to combat effectively international crime which is constantly attempting to misuse the facilities of the TIR regime and to evade payment of customs duties and taxes. The fight against such international criminal activities in a concerted manner is of utmost importance.

At its first constitutive session, the TIR Executive Board decided to address, on a priority basis, difficulties in the application of the TIR regime in Eastern Europe in which more than half of all TIR transport operations end or begin. It was also decided that the TIR Executive Board would ensure an early reintroduction of guarantee or insurance coverage for all transported commodities under the TIR regime. Furthermore, the TIR Executive Board decided in principle to focus its work on a complete implementation of the EDI control system for TIR Carnets (IRU SAFETIR) in all TIR countries and to assist the IRU in its endeavours to improve the completeness and correctness of data transmitted by national customs authorities.

The TIR Convention is administered by UN/ECE and, at present, 62 States are Parties to it. The Convention establishes customs transit procedures which provide for wide-ranging facilities for international goods transport by road, allowing for unhindered goods transport under customs seal, based on an international guarantee, from Norway to Iran and from Portugal to Kazakhstan with only minimal customs control at the borders. At present, nearly 3 million TIR transport operations are registered per year and it can be safely said that without the TIR regime the present volumes of land transport and trade, particularly between countries of the European Union and eastern Europe, would not be possible. ❑

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Water and health in Europe

One European in seven does not have access to safe water. Cholera, typhoid fever and hepatitis A are water-related diseases often associated with developing countries or perhaps medieval Europe. Yet at the dawn of the third millennium, these diseases are making a comeback in some European countries. In Albania, for example, 25 people died of cholera in 1994 after drinking contaminated water. In Latvia, several hundred cases of hepatitis A and bacterial dysentery are attributed to contaminated drinking water each year. In Tajikistan, some 4,000 cases of typhoid fever were reported in 1996 following heavy rainfall. In the past decade there have been some 190 outbreaks of bacterial dysentery, 70 outbreaks of hepatitis A and 45 outbreaks of typhoid fever associated with drinking water and recreational water in Europe and central Asia. These are only the best known water-related diseases. Others, which are even more widespread, are affecting even countries otherwise known for their high level of sanitation.

UN/ECE and the World Health Organization (WHO) are tackling the crisis in water and health, and months of negotiation with European Governments have produced a legally-binding protocol to combat water-related disease. The Protocol on Water and Health to the UN/ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes should help countries to reduce such outbreaks by providing safe drinking water and recreational water to people throughout Europe. The Protocol has been drawn up under the auspices of UN/ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. Its ultimate aim is to reduce, control and prevent water-related disease. It is expected to be signed at the Third Ministerial Conference for Environment and Health, in London on 16-18 June. ❑

DECONTAMINATING POLLUTED SITES

A UN/ECE Seminar in association with Interchimie'99

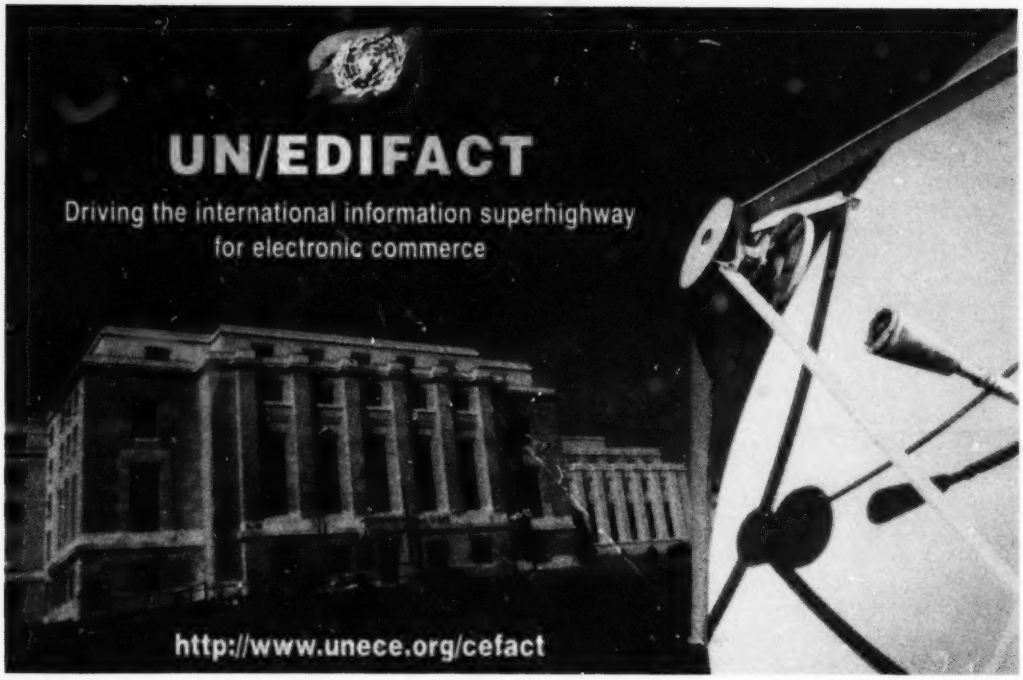
Areas containing remains of old chemical plants, spills of toxic metals, and other contaminants are being identified more and more frequently throughout Europe. In fact more than 6,000 sites are in need of decontamination. During the last three years some 200 of them have been cleaned up using new technologies, and the sites are being used for a wide variety of applications. Part of the site of the recent Expo'98 in Lisbon, for example, was formerly a chemical refinery which had leaked a number of toxic chemicals into the soil; this site was cleaned for the Exhibition, and now a housing development is under construction there. A former paint factory site near Paris has been completely decontaminated and a new chemical facility for pharmaceuticals constructed on the old land. Numerous wasteland sites in eastern and central Europe are now being decontaminated, in part thanks to a programme launched by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE).

As part of this practical down-to-earth programme, UNECE, in association with Interchimie'99 of France, organized a *Seminar on Analysis, Methodology of Treatment and Remediation of Contaminated Soils*, which took place on 13-15 April 1999 at the Parc des Expositions de Paris-Nord at Paris/Villepinte. Over 80 papers from more than a dozen countries were presented during the seminar. ❑

TRADE FACILITATION

Countries met at Geneva to discuss trade facilitation and electronic business

One hundred and fifty participants from nearly 50 countries attended on Monday 15 March the international Seminar on Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business organized by UN/CEFACT, the United Nations Centre for the Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport. The Seminar addressed major issues in trade facilitation and the implications for international trade of the rapid development of electronic commerce and various other new technologies.



Benefits and challenges related to implementing UN/EDIFACT, the United Nations standard for electronic data interchange (EDI), were illustrated by the French multinational company Casino. EDI allows companies to exchange trade and other structured data between computers and applications. Casino is in the supermarket business and is using EDI to automate its purchasing, logistics and financial transactions with its suppliers. A high percentage of its current 6,000 suppliers are already using the UN/EDIFACT standard and the remainder are expected to be doing so by the year 2002.

One of the highlights of the Seminar was the presentation by the World Customs Organization of the revision of the Kyoto Convention which defines customs organizations' significant role in trade facilitation and is of great importance for simple and effective trade procedures. Corruption in trade and some projects for combating it were also discussed.

UN/CEFACT is constantly investigating ways and means to improve the quality and scope of trade facilitation tools. To that effect, the Seminar heard several presentations on new techniques, such as Extensible Markup Language (XML), Simpl-EDI and Object-oriented EDI, and the use of the Internet in international trade. Simpl-EDI is an effort to adopt traditional EDI to small and medium-sized enterprises. XML is a standard for creating forms that can be filled in on a computer screen and is promising for facilitating electronic commerce on the Internet. Object-oriented EDI is being developed as the basis of the next generation of EDI.❑

United Nations Centre makes further advances in trade facilitation and electronic business

The United Nations Centre for the Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/CEFACT) held its annual meeting in Geneva on 16-17 March 1999. Following a highly successful seminar on 15 March on the current issues in Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, the Plenary met during 16 and 17 March and was attended by 37 countries and 18 international organizations.

The results of the meeting emphasized the Centre's unique role of simplifying global trade in the era of electronic business. Among the highlights were: a new Recommendation was approved in the important area of Pre-shipment Inspection. Three other revised trade facilitation recommendations to Governments were approved and work on new recommendations announced, including one on the adoption of the customs harmonized system in the trade and transport sector.

The meeting recognized the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to the growth of the global economy and their need for simple open processes

for international trade. To support these processes, the Plenary endorsed the results of a project to identify a core set of data and messages. Known as SIMPL-EDI, this work will now be incorporated into the mainstream of UN/CEFACT's activities. As part of its continuing review of new technologies, the Centre further recognized XML (Extensible Markup Language) as a key tool in extending electronic business, particularly over the Internet, to a larger community of users. Some important measures were adopted to improve the efficiency of UN/EDIFACT—one of the cornerstones of worldwide electronic business. Coordination was to be further improved with the other United Nations regional commissions in the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America, Africa and Western Asia. ❑

ENERGY IN THE ECE REGION

Turner's gift to support new UN/ECE Project on Energy Efficiency

The United Nations Foundation, established by Mr. R. E. Turner to oversee the administration of his gift to the United Nations, approved up to US$ 2 million for the UN/ECE proposal on Energy Efficiency Investments for Climate Change Mitigation. This three-year project will enhance the energy efficiency, infrastructure and capacity of five eastern European and CIS countries (Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Ukraine) which have signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and will provide resources to the project. As part of the UN/ECE supported Energy Efficiency 2000 project, it will focus on specific initiatives in three areas: municipal lighting, hospitals and district heating. The specific objectives are to develop skills in the private and public sectors; identify, develop, finance and implement energy-efficient projects; improve energy efficiency policies in the five participating countries; and develop the infrastructure and practices of commercial banks and other private sector participants in financing energy efficiency projects. The project is to be implemented under UN/ECE auspices by municipal authorities, ministries of energy and environment, and national energy conservation agencies. ❑

COMMERCIAL BANK FINANCE FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROJECTS

UN/ECE links seminar with the Internet

Central and eastern European commercial banks and companies sponsored a Business Briefing Seminar of the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project on 28-29 January 1999 in Prague, the Czech Republic, to examine how commercial sector financing of energy efficiency projects can be increased to expand a market in which development banks play a catalytic role at present. The seminar reviewed a wide range of market formation activities presented by the managers of successful projects, selected financial experts, bank officers and senior government officials. The cross-cutting subject areas included: new commercial sector financing mechanisms; confidence and awareness; policy framework; financial barriers; legal and commercial constraints. The seminar was broadcast as a teleconference and seminar material was made available on the Internet via the ECE Energy Efficiency 2000 Project Website http://www.ee2000.net.

The seminar was followed by the third session of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Financial Engineering of the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project on 29 January 1999. The Ad Hoc Group of Experts formulated conclusions and recommendations for ECE members on expanding commercial sector energy efficiency project finance in eastern Europe following a round-table discussion. The proceedings of the Business Briefing Seminar and the Ad Hoc Group of Experts session will be issued as a publication of the ECE Energy Series during 1999. ❑

Entering the European Union single gas market: challenges for central and eastern European countries

"The new EU directive which promotes a single gas market for Europe constitutes an additional challenge for Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). It comes on the heels of the current restructuring that was required in moving from a centralized planned system to a market-oriented one", stresses Mr. Wolfgang Ziehengraser, Vice-Chairman of the Board of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) Gas Centre. Most of the CEECs have only just started their process of privatization and for most of them access to the EU or to its single market will mean an increase in the price of their gas. It is a great challenge which will require careful preparation.

This is the reason why the UN/ECE Gas Centre organized a task force meeting to assist CEECs in implementing the EU Gas Directive and to promote the transfer of ex-perience from EU to CEECs-based companies. The meeting, co-organized and hosted by MOL, the Hungarian oil and gas company, was held in early March at the Szirák castle in Hungary. Three CEECs cases were presented at the meeting: Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. The presentations and discussions demonstrated the need for a step-by-step approach to market liberalization in

CEECs preserving security of supply and the financial health of the gas operators and the importance of the EU Gas Directive as one of the elements of market restructuring and liberalization.

DEMOGRAPHIC NEWS

Regional Population Meeting ICPD + 5 Regional Reviews

The regional Population Meeting for Europe jointly organized by ECE, UNFPA and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office was hosted by the Government of Hungary and took place in Budapest from 7-9 December 1998. The Meeting was held in the context of the current quinquennial global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). It conducted a review and appraisal of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and of the recommendations of the European Population Conference (Geneva 1993) which was the ECE regional preparatory meeting for the Cairo Conference.

The deliberations centred on five salient population issues: fertility, family and gender issues; reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health; morality and health; population ageing; and international migration. It was observed that in the intervening short period of time since the EPC and the ICPD, population developments in many parts of the world have taken a new turn. Developments that five years ago appeared to be largely specific to Europe were now widely recognized to be taking place in other parts of the world, particularly in east and south-east Asia. Lower infant and child mortality, below-replacement fertility and accelerating population ageing with its many ramifications were rapidly spreading. In view of this, the demographic developments currently characterizing the region and the policy responses they attract, were taking on a wider relevance.

The meeting adopted a set of conclusions which highlighted the major issues, problems and policy responses addressed by the meeting and fully reaffirmed the agreements and commitments made at the ICPD and EPC Conferences and agreed that future endeavours should build on and go beyond the recommendations and the programme of action so that the recent developments in the ECE region are fully addressed.

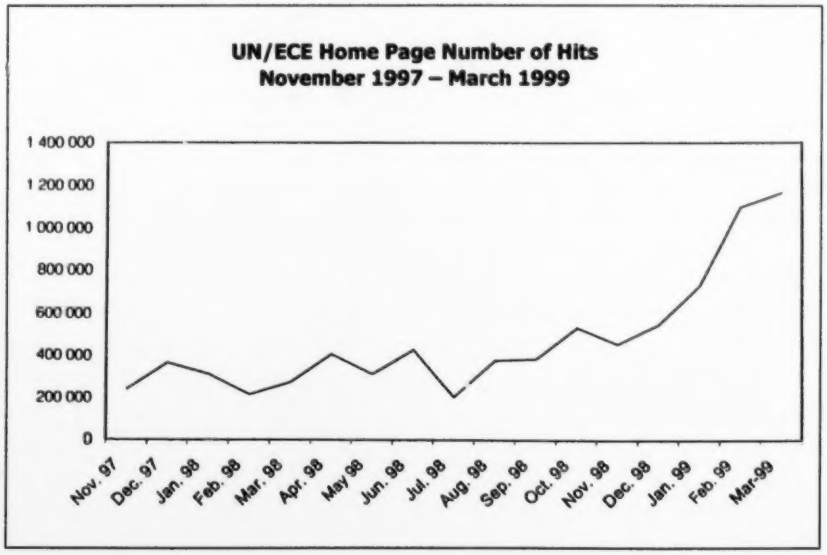
Forum on Improving Trade Finance and Investment for the Timber Sector in Russia and the CIS

A UN/ECE Forum on Improving Trade Finance and Investment for the Timber Sector in Russia and the CIS was held at the Palais des Nations on Friday, 26 February 1999. The meeting was structured into three sessions where different aspects of the topic were discussed. Session one was devoted to trade finance options for the CIS; session two dealt with timber industry strategies to obtain trade finance and investment while session three discussed the experience of financial institutions in the CIS. Working groups were organized after the sessions to discuss recommendations for trade finance, investment and timber ports. ❑

More than 1.1 million hits for UN/ECE home page

In February, the hits on the UN/ECE website soared for the first time through the one million hit barrier and in March 1999, the UN/ECE home page received 1.165 million hits. In comparison, in April, UNCTAD received 99,586 thousand hits, UNHCR 1 million, IMO, 342 thousands, ITC 274 thousand.

For UN/ECE, this represents one hit every 2 seconds, more than 55,000 different user sessions who spend an average of 12 minutes consulting the UN/ECE site. Each of them was looking at an average of 6 to 7 pages. It represents an average



increase of around 15 per cent per month over the last year. It has to be noted that these figures underestimate the number of hits of the UN/ECE website as some of the UN/ECE information, such as those related to the Gas Centre and to transport are located on other servers for which statistics are unavailable. Information on UN/ECE is also given through mirror pages located throughout the world.

The most visited pages are trade, statistics, those related to information (press releases, list of publications, general information . . .), transport, CEFACT and to a lesser extent environment. As a point of interest, in April alone, more than 1,200 users played with the UN/ECE game which enables not only children but also adults to learn more about UN/ECE. ❑

JUST PUBLISHED

Media on ECE-1998
How others see us

Numerous articles have been written about UN/ECE during 1998 in a wide spectrum of newspapers worldwide. The titles of some 300 articles are listed in this publication by topic, under such sectors as economic analysis; population; environment; robots; steel; timber; transport; protection of intellectual property rights and others. The list reflects only a portion of what was actually written about UN/ECE. For illustrative purposes, the document also contains some of the clippings. It can be obtained from the ECE Information Officer by quoting ECE/INF/NONE/99/6.

LOOKING AHEAD

Fifty-fourth annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe, 4 to 6 May 1999

The fifty-fourth annual session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe will be held from 4 to 6 May 1999 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. It will be preceded by a UN/ECE Spring Seminar on Monday, 3 May, devoted to the subject of population ageing and the macroeconomics of pension reform. At the Commission's opening session on Tuesday, 4 May, a seminar will take place on the consequences of the financial crisis in the ECE region. The discussion will focus on the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on the ECE region, with special emphasis on western and eastern Europe. The debate will offer a diagnosis of the causes of the crisis, its likely effects on economic growth in the region and the extent to which they may be offset by policy responses, and ask whether such shocks can be avoided or at least mitigated in the future. The more traditional part of the session will then focus on the direction of ECE activities, its operational activities and its cooperation with regional/subregional groupings, initiatives and organizations. ❑

WHERE TO ORDER

The publications listed with sales prices may be ordered from: **United Nations Bookshop, Sales Unit, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland** and a number of bookstores in the ECE region. Send cheque or money order in US$ made payable to: UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS.

Those publications listed without a sales price may be obtained from the Information Officer, Economic Commission for Europe, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.

Editorial

Europe's willpower

Europe is a unified and diverse region. It has no other foundation than the shared values of its people and a sense of common destiny. It is a demanding task for all concerned to build and preserve Europe's unity while respecting its diversity. It is an even more pressing duty today since the events in Kosovo have caused old religious and ethnic divisions to resurface.

At the same time, economic disparities have worsened: between the poorest and the richest countries the difference in GNP per capita was 1 to 5 in 1990 and today it is 1 to 9. These differences are due to the difficulties of the transition process. It is a slow, complex and often painful process to construct a democracy and a market economy. In certain countries this process has hardly begun or is blocked in certain regions by ethnic conflicts and sometimes by wars. These disparities increase the risks of division.

In these circumstances, the people of Europe need a common objective. They need to know that their leaders have decided to create a Europe where each country is respected and has its place whatever its religious differences, level of economic development, or its affiliation to one subregional entity or another. More then ever, the Economic Commission for Europe and other pan-European organizations such as OSCE and the Council of Europe should contribute to the achievement of this goal; their neutrality and their experience enable them to construct thousands of links which constitute the strength of families.

Yves BERTHELOT

The Executive Secretary
Economic Commission for Europe

ECE Calendar

1999

May

3	Spring Seminar on the Economic Implications of Population Ageing in the ECE Region
4-6	FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
10-12	Meeting of the Specialized Section on the Standardization of Meat (porcine, bovine and poultry)
17-19	Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies
25-28	Joint Meeting of the RID Safety Committee and the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, (Bern, Switzerland)
25-28	Working Party on Pollution and Energy
26-28	Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics
31	Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution—special session
31-2 June	Steering Committee of the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project

June

3-5	Seminar and Study Tour on Clean Coal Technologies (Kladno, Czech Republic)
8-10	COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT
7-11	Meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, Fruit
14-16	CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS (Neuchatel, Switzerland)
23-25	Joint ECE/Eurostat/FAO/OECD Meeting on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Europe

July

1-2	Working Group on Abatement Techniques

August

25-27	Working Group on Effects
30-3 Sept.	Working Group on Strategies

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